Esphey Miss Esphey

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Sancti Spiritus, Cuba.

In the very heart of the island of Cuba, in Santa Clara province, is the city of Sancti Spiritus, where the Presbyterian church has one of its mission stations. The work is being carried on along two lines, - the church and the day school. Let me tell you first about the church, which is under the care of Rev. H. S. Harris.

If you were to pass a Sabbath day here with us you would have a great many things to see, beginning with Sabbath School at half past eight in the morning. Mr. Harris is the superintendent and there are five classes besides the Primary department under Mrs. Harris. One of the Sabbath school teachers is a young woman who acts as "visitor" as well as being Superintendent of the Home Department which has about thirty members. Since everything is in Spanish at this service you would be very glad when ten o' clock brought the English preaching service, with its twenty five or thirty English speaking people, including a number of American soldiers from the fort on the hill. After "breakfast" at eleven thirty you would have a little rest till three o'clock when it would be time to go with Mr. Harris to the North Chapel, a mile away at the other side of town. There you would find the second Sabbath School, composed like the first of both adults and children. Back again to the house for five o'clock dinner, there would be just time enough to rest a few minutes before "Christian Endeavor" at half past six. At this meeting you would be surprised at the interest and the attendance, and the evident

earnestness of those who take part. This meeting is held in the main building, upstairs on the floor with the day school rooms, so at the close one has to find his way downstairs to the church room for the evening service in Spanish, with its singing responsive reading, and interesting sermons. The organ a violin and two flutes, all played by Cubans, help in making the service attractive, while sometimes there is a chorus of school children who sing at least one number alone. So much for the Sabbath day; but there are the prayer-meetings, - Tuesday evening at the north chapel and Wednesday at the main building, both well attended. Usually the meeting takes the form of a Bible conference led by the pastor, but on the first Wednesday of each month they are more general, - testimony meetings in which the members are learning to take efficient part.

Now to tell you about the day school of which Miss Ross and I have charge. It was started nearly three years ago by Miss French, who taught six months and then resigned to go to Porto Rico under the Congregational church board. Two years ago, then, Miss Ross and I came (under the Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church), knowing only a few words of Spanish and entirely ignorant of the conditions except that it was a hard field because of the strong catholic element in the school. Three weeks after our arrival, ~~we opened the school and conducted classes the best we could~~, rather than lose our pupils by delaying the opening.

Since then we have had four Cuban helpers, only one of whom is with us now, - Isabel Fajas who was a pupil last year. Mrs. Lopez who had helped us two years with the numerous younger children failed us this summer, so Isabel is taking her place till our new American Teacher, Miss Ida Pyland, can master the Spanish; so as the school is now, there are three rooms; Boys advanced work, under Miss Ross, Girls - the same, under Miss Espey, and the Primary work under Isabel Fajas and Miss Ida Pyland who can as yet teach only English classes. The three rooms are crowded.

The work is almost all in Spanish, including Arithmetic, Geography, History of Cuba, Physiology, Spanish Grammar, Spanish Reading, writing and drawing. English is taught, both Grammar and Reading classes, much as French and German are at home.

In all the rooms there are classes in Bible work, ranging from the primary 'Story of the Gospel" to the more advanced study of the life of Christ and the Old Testament. There has been one catechism class of seven, all of whom secured beautiful Bibles in Spanish. The Bible work is being greatly helped by the use of the new maps secured through the interest of Dr. J. R. Miller of Philadelphia. All of this religious instruction is entirely apart from the daily opening exercises held in the C. E. rooms, where all the pupils, both boys and girls gather for singing Bible reading and the Lord's Prayer.

Through the kindness of friends a set each of wands, Indian clubs and dumb-bells was provided a year ago, and the result has been great interest in the daily gymnastic work during the morning

sisses in cool weather. A fund has been provided also, having reached thirty dollars already, for the purchase of good books in Spanish for a school library one of the greatest needs we have found. With a view to the new building, the library and the Bible classes, the older girls and their teacher have clubbed together in order to secure the two volumes of Tissot Old Testament pictures published in book form, besides two large pictures from the New Testament by the same artist.

In view of the failure of the Cuban national government, and the success of the "school city" plan in schools of the north, the latter has just been set in operation among our boys and girls. There are their officials among the boys and still others among the girls; a constitution drawn up and adopted by themselves, and a series of laws and punishments from the same source. All transgressions are reported by pupil policemen & tried by pupil judges unless so serious as to go before the "Supreme Court" which includes the teachers. In this way we are earnestly hoping to train the children to be self controlled and fitted for the serious tasks of maturer life.

Sewing has been the only kind of manual training we have been able to introduce so far because of lack of time and strength among the workers: but in as far as we are able we are doing our best to secure all the best training possible for our boys and girls, be that training physical, mental, moral or spiritual.

It is to help this church and this school

that your gifts have been asked. Unless we can soon have a new building we may at any time be turned out of the one we are now using, with nowhere to go, for no other place in town will accommodate the School. The present building from three sides presents the appearance of a ruin because it is the last part of an old Catholic Church and convent now torn down. The city to whom the property belongs, is ashamed of it and and wishes to raze it all and add it to the public park, so we are able to retain it only by strenuous efforts. Any one less determined than Mr. Harris would never have succeeded in holding it as long as this, for at least three times we have been given notice to move;- once all the furniture was packed up.

There is one question that very likely may be asked about the building - "Is it used as a home by the ministers or the teachers?" The pastor has his study there and the janitor and his wife one sleeping room and the corner of a dower lumber room as dining room and kitchen. Mr. Harris and his family have a separate house where for one year two of the teachers made their home, but for the past two years since the increase in the "faculty" the teachers have established a home of their own renting a house and in large measure furnishing it from their own salaries.

So far we have discussed only the present conditions, without a single word in regard to the prospects before the school. The city is noted for its interest in education, yet so far, there is neither kindergarten nor highschool, both of which it is our aim to establish in connection with our school. That the city would welcome such a move was proved last year by the strong letters given by the mayor and others endorsing Mr. Harris's plea for funds when he went home to the United States A normal department is sadly needed, as well for here in Cuba there are as yet no normal schools and teachers are poorly equipped. Just at present there are two girls who are preparing themselves in our school. One of these is a member of our own church, - the other though from a very Catholic family is quite in favor of many things we believe, and would attend services if her family permitted her. It is our hope to give these girls and others a good, thorough, practical course that will render them so efficient that they will be able to fill responsible positions in the public schools, thus enlarging the influence of both church and school, and giving the Cubans examples of a high christian ideal for personality and character.

We know just where, in the United States, there are two consecrated young women, now teaching in High Schools, who are already studying Spanish and preparing themselves in every way they know, and are simply waiting for the new building to afford the opportunity before offering their services to the Board.

We are then, at one of the most critical points in the history of the work here; and the people at home have it in their power to enable us to go ahead to greater things for Cuba. If they could but know the Cubans as we do, they too would yearn to do all that possibly can be done to give such opportunities for the development and training of Christian character among this people so long misguided and oppressed. They do not know what high ideals in personal or civic life mean, and how can they be different unless someone gives them a chance to learn when they are children?